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THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTRY

BY

JOHN OMAN, D.D.

Principal of Westminster College, Cambridge,
Author of *Vision and Authority*,
Grace and Personality, etc.



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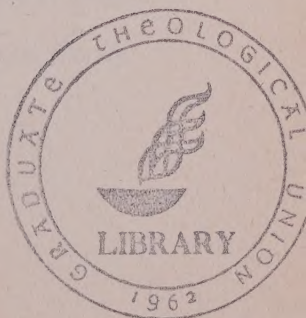
STUDENT CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT

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663
04
1928

First published September, 1928

*Made and printed in Great Britain by
The Garden City Press Ltd., Letchworth, Herts*

FOREWORD

THESE addresses were given to a meeting at Dunblane of ministers of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church, and are published at their request. I have not thought it necessary to alter what was specially concerned with that occasion, because a statement has often more concrete universal application from having its origin in particular circumstances.

JOHN OMAN.

The Office of the Ministry

I

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A GERMAN theological student once described to me the work of the ministry in his country as being "*aller menschen Mädchen*," which means "general slavey." This is not quite the same as "Made myself servant unto all," and is certainly not waiting on our own special ministry. The limitation of ourselves to the exercise of our own gifts in our own sphere is an important part of what I have to say. Yet, in being here at all, I fear I am rather showing a bad example in departing from my own.

It is not because I am ignorant of my limitation that I am here. But first of all, the man who asked me to come has a way of putting his request, which made me unwilling to oppose his judgment that I might help, and ready to forget that it might only be the outcome of the largeness of his charity. Add to this that it came to an exile sitting by the waters of Babylon and hanging such harp as he had for cheering himself upon the pollard willows. And you will understand how it was easy to be persuaded to visit the mountains round about Jerusalem. Finally, in an academic atmosphere, it is easy to lose touch with the active life of the Church, and with it what makes theology profitable. About your profit I had my doubts, but about my own I had none : and I trust you will not be too conscious that it was a wrong kind of self-interest, and be glad

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to think that you have given more inspiration than you have received.

Counting from my time as assistant, I was just on the point of attaining my majority in the pastoral office. That was no doubt a fair time for gaining some knowledge of the work. But some of you have been much longer at it than that. Moreover, you are still at it, whereas I am now on the point of attaining my majority in the professorial office ; and that is a long time in which to forget. Besides, the conditions of the ministry in England are very different from what they are in Scotland. And, finally, they have not remained fixed, but have very greatly changed in both countries in these years.

There are, however, considerations, to be set over against these defects, which give some encouragement. The spectator is supposed to be the person who best sees the game, especially if he is an old player. The conditions in Scotland are much more like what they were in England twenty years ago.

Fewer people go as a custom to the synagogue on the Sabbath, and still fewer extend the custom to two services. The custom rather is the week-end ticket, the motor-car and the charabanc. And in those who still attend you can no longer assume reading of the Bible as a preparation for the teaching, or family worship as a preparation for the devotions. Nor does the pulpit now consecrate what is said from it. Yet, on the other hand, what you say is not so readily taken to be just what you ought to have said, or the prayers to be mere impressive forms. The practical consequences also are more real demands upon life, which is perhaps an encouraging reason, among the many discouraging, why church-going is felt to be a less comfortable way of passing

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the time than it used to be. In all this your situation is little different from ours. The important matters of the ministry are eternal and not of the fashion of any time ; and perhaps one sees this in better perspective when looking at it from some distance.

Looked at in this way, the important and difficult question is what can make a man's ministry a growing influence, so that it could be, if necessary, carried on with success, for a lifetime, in one place. It takes a long time to make a deep influence on a congregation. Among ourselves at least I know of no congregation which has a character of its own and maintains its influence, which has not some man's long ministry at its foundation. Moreover, there ought to be an impression on the whole community, and it is at least a question whether the obvious shortcoming in this respect compared with former days is not partly due to frequent changes of pastorate.

Anyhow every man who enters the ministry ought to face the fact that, whether it be long or short in any place, it should be of a kind which could be a power for one community for a whole lifetime : and it is such a possibility that I wish to consider.

Our long training makes at least a good foundation : and perhaps the only difference it makes is in its wearing quality. For immediate popular effect it may rather be loss than gain. But can any Church abide in power on immediate popular effect ?

Yet, with any training, a long ministry is a hard test both of the man and of his message ; and perhaps at no time since the days of the apostles was it harder than now. Possibly also at no time was it more necessary to try to meet the demand, most tasks being important in proportion to their difficulty.

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The first asset for a long ministry is obviously the man himself. Unless there is a depth and strength and quality of character in him which makes him a greater influence as he is better known, he is not likely to maintain and extend any ministry. Much of this depends on the gifts given him, and more on the graces, the growth of which concerns deeper issues than can be dealt with in a lecture or perhaps in any mere exposition. But even able and good men may fail through not taking their business rightly in hand, and it is this more obvious yet very important matter we may consider together with profit.

These defects may be summed up as the wrong way of being unlike and of being like our people. In other words it is so easy to be a parson, so difficult to be an apostle.

These difficulties we shall take in turn :

I. *The wrong way of a minister being unlike his people.* The ministry is an isolating sort of a job anyhow, yet the real trouble only begins with the development of the clerical mind, which likes the isolation. But the first duty of a minister is to continue to be a man and not sink into being merely a parson. Some people ascribe the whole trouble to the wearing of a clerical collar and sombre raiment. Unfortunately it goes deeper, and is not so easily remedied. It has also equally visible ways of appearing. Perhaps the real clerical person would be even more conspicuously what he is in a pink tie and tartan plus-fours, because he would only draw more attention by incongruity to his true character. Besides, it is not there that the really troublesome difference lies. Every man more or less looks like his job : and there is no reason why he should not. The real trouble is with a mentality which makes us lose the

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two sources of inspiration—faithful human dealing with our own souls, and sympathetic human understanding of other people: with the result of appalling externality in our view of ourselves and abysmal ignorance of our fellow-mortals.

The first fatal difference from our people who are in secular employment is in the way in which we do our job.

The difficulty is not merely that our work is irregular. That is true of much other work besides the minister's. But the minister depends, more than most other men, on inspiration, and that is apt to depend on moods. The effect of this experience of doing things easily and well at one time, and laboriously and badly at another, is too frequently to make men imagine that they can profitably become mere creatures of impulse: and through this alone many have come to grief.

The discipline of regular work is so necessary for all other discipline that you will perhaps see that I have some excuse, if what I say has more insistence than freshness. I begin with perhaps the hardest wrought of all illustrations. The foundation is the serious part of every building, and the foundation of a good life is good habit. But what is not of such universal recognition is that some of us have not bed-rock with which to start. The situation is often much nearer what is in our part of the country, where the natural provision is a blue putty called gault, which needs a vast deal of reinforcing. The more we think we can do without it, by reason of fluent speech and an easy way of dropping in on people, the more perhaps we need to be heedful.

A matter of the first importance, in which it is possible to differ disastrously from the man who

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has to go forth to his work at a fixed hour in the morning, is in attaching less importance to that common article of household furniture—the clock. I am not urging anything very heroic such as five o'clock summer time. Whether it is good for work I don't know, not having tried it. Possibly it might give a sense of too great superiority to common habits to be good for one's soul. But we should, at least, not be behind the shop-keeper or the bank-clerk. Let us say, breakfast at eight and being in your study, girt physically and mentally, by nine.

Small things count for a great deal, so I put "physically" first. Few men work as well in slippers as in shoes; and when you feel particularly slack, there is sometimes virtue in putting on your boots. A man in his study in his bedroom slippers, unshaved and in his dressing-gown, is in about as perilous a state for his soul as a man who takes to secret drinking. In short, we must be like our more industrious lay brethren by starting the day as though we meant to do a day's work.

This will do something to gird our loins mentally. But it is necessary not to dissipate the effect with the newspaper and letters and small distractions. The number of hours you work is of far less consequence than concentration.

I once had a student who was what used to be senior classic at twenty and took most things in his own line before him in Cambridge University on three hours' private study a day. But it was study, and it was every day. If you do that first thing in the morning, you can be trusted implicitly for using well the rest of the day, even if to outward appearance you did nothing. But I don't believe a minister can do it except early. Only then

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will your time be respected, and only then will you be fresh.

Burning the midnight oil is mostly self-deception. You have a vastly pleasant sense of doing things well, but it is only because your critical faculties have gone to sleep. You write easily because it is extempore writing, which is a deadlier gift even than extempore speaking. Better lose your spontaneity than your critical judgment, and it is easier to keep at midday than at midnight. In short, not less but more, because our workshop is in our own houses and we have no time-keeper to pass, we need to go forth with other men to our work in the morning. A favourite description of Jeremiah of God's earnestness about the salvation of his people is that he rises up early to send his prophets ; and naturally his prophets should follow his example.

But, for most men in the ministry, the next requirement, which is to learn to shut the shop, is even more difficult. Unfortunately this can't be done at six, nor can you observe one day in seven on the proper day. But you ought to keep it some day, and be able to put up the shutters for some time every day. The continued power of interest and application is largely the power to change the interest and unbend the bow. In reading Gladstone's Life I was impressed by his power of work, but still more by what was the secret of it, the power to say good-bye to it when done. This becomes more difficult as life goes on, but one of the first duties of advancing years is to stand up against the tyranny of dull drudgery. As the years go on you may find it more difficult, but you will certainly find it more necessary.

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This leads to a matter of higher, if not of deeper importance. We can too easily become different from our people just in the common religious life, (*a*) in its daily practice, (*b*) in its simpler faith, and (*c*) in its regular nourishment.

(*a*) Its daily practice. Religion so easily becomes an external matter we preach about. By certain temptations we are not assailed. We are not tempted to drink or gamble; we are not faced by the possible profit of shady transactions; we are perhaps too much supported by the necessity of being examples in all the respectabilities. But how does it stand with us, for example, about freedom from anxiety? Most of you cannot be free by having nothing to cause anxiety. The minimum stipend in an expensive small town in the old days was, I know by experience, difficult enough; and the minimum stipend does not go as far to-day as it did then. I know also the difficulty of keeping a struggling congregation above water; and this is still greater to-day. Some of you, perhaps, have uncertain health; and those of us whom nature has made pretty tough, do not always realise what an asset health is. If you are young, situations arise in which you are not sure of your action. If you are older, you find yourselves less fresh, less spontaneous, less fruitful in ideas, less energetic in presenting what you have. Everyone knows where his own shoe pinches, and at times we exaggerate our difficulties compared with other callings, but there is no one's ministry to-day which may not be the most appalling worry, if once he lets himself go.

But the servant of the Lord should not worry, any more than he should strive. Even the sense

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of responsibility can become unchristian. With it too you have to cast your burden upon the Lord.

Worry is not a mere shortcoming. It is the end of your ministry of reconciliation. It means that it is no longer a ministry of faith in God, of reconciliation to him in life with its tasks and trials, of consolation and peace and victory in your heart within and your situation without.

Here we test our working, every-day religion as perhaps nowhere else. Here also we prove our value for our hard-pressed, burdened, struggling fellow-men. For us, as for them, there is no succour except faith in God through our Master who took life as it came, and reconciliation to God in our duty and discipline, and victory with Him who faced it utterly, in the firm assurance that all our difficulties are among the things which work for good. Mere renunciation, which is often what is understood by being crucified to the world and the world to us, is nothing to glory in. What the cross does mean is the joy of victory over our own fears, and victory over the world in being set free from its threatening as well as its allurements. It has become rather a fashion to talk of self-sacrifice. As James Chalmers said, "Don't send us fellows who talk of self-sacrifice. Send us fellows who take dangers and difficulties as the pepper and salt of life."

Perhaps nothing has so much to do with sustaining variety and interest in preaching, and indeed in the whole service as responsiveness to life. Sameness of mood far sooner becomes monotonous than sameness of idea. One of the most unexpected and therefore interesting preachers I ever knew could ride one idea for a twelvemonth, but in mood he was

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once described justly as an ecclesiastical Micawber. "The sun has gone down upon the dreary scene and I am for ever floored," and by the time you had called to commiserate his state the world is a blaze of sunshine and hope. After all, there is a great deal more power in expecting something to turn up, than to fall into the one idea of everything being already turned down. This kind of optimism I am not urging, but after all life should stir every mood of joy and sorrow and triumph and pathos and sublimity and absurdity, and when you are responding to it with all the strings broken but one, and you are no Paganini as a performer, it is pretty dull and wearisome music.

What makes Christianity attractive in the ordinary church-goer is just humanity, cheerful patience, a humility which neither asserts itself nor defers too much to human judgment, kindness, consideration, self-forgetfulness, sympathy, understanding. And the spring of no man's ministry ever fails or runs dry in which these things shine.

(b) The next is the simple things of faith. The necessity of our calling forces us to look at them differently from other people. We ought to know the difficulties better than they do ; we have to take in much of our knowledge in abstract ways. But, after all, we only approve things that are excellent by living excellently in them. We have to manifest, not prove, the existence of God. Questions about the gospels are a small concern compared with knowing, by living in it, the world in which Jesus spoke. Questions about the atonement are nothing compared with knowing that, the more we are sensitive to sin, the more in Christ we find peace. The ministry is a dreary business unless the joy of the

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Lord is our strength. In short, however much the minister should be more, he should be just the common lay religious person.

(c) Finally, there is the question of our ordinary Christian nourishment. Do we not perhaps often fail to provide it because we have ourselves lost our taste for it? The great task is to worship with our people, and not merely conduct their worship, and, when we preach, to be part of our own audience.

Now that I am frequently a hearer, I am often puzzled about what makes a service worship. It does not depend either on having a liturgy or wanting it. It does not depend on the sincerity or even the piety of the minister. More and more I come to think that it depends on worshipping with the congregation and not merely conducting their worship. Even in the reading, there is some subtle difference between reading for mutual edification and doing it to impress others. As for preaching, I have not the slightest idea what makes it popular. Perhaps I am constitutionally not responsive, but much of the popular preaching I have heard seems to me trivial in matter and tawdry in form. Yet I think I have now a pretty clear idea of what is edifying in preaching: and it is what a man is saying to his own soul, as well as to the souls of others. In this way Sunday may be for the minister himself a day of refreshing from the Lord. Otherwise, it is an impoverishing as well as a dull drudgery.

With regard to other means of grace, I have not much to say. A minister cannot quite help reading his Bible: and I think he gets a great deal from steady reading in the original. In my present work I have learned to know the New Testament as never

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before, but I am indebted to my reading as a minister for my knowledge of the Old. That, in spite of the defects of my Hebrew, I wrought through a good part of it in the original, remains a permanent source of religious knowledge and inspiration. But there is also something in Mr. Connington's practice of reading the English Bible for purposes of edification, as he then laid aside the scholar and became the simple Christian.

Of other means of grace I speak with hesitation, because they are not the same for everyone. I have to confess myself not greatly edified by most of the devotional literature, even by such classics as Augustine's *Confessions* and *The Imitation* and *Grace Abounding*; and the mystical literature I have waded through leaves on me mainly an impression of auto-suggestion. I do not mean that I could have done without such reading or that I derived no profit, but I did not find in them, what seems to me at least, the simple, natural, human, gracious, calm, enterprising Christianity of Christ. Luther's *Freedom of a Christian Man*, John Woolman's *Journal*, and the *Life of Mary Slessor* impress me much more with the spontaneous natural venture of faith. But when my spirit is parched, I much more readily go to the poets than to any of them. Milton and Wordsworth I suppose anyone would grant. But I go more frequently to Shakespeare, whom I don't find to be the purely worldly poet some people do. Who but the Master Himself ever so loved the kindly race of men: and is not that itself religion?

II. *The wrong way of being like our people.* If we may be useless to our people from lack of ordinary humanity, we can also be useless to them

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by too readily falling into their views and ways of acting. From another standpoint we can only help them as we differ from them.

My first point may seem to be in flat contradiction to what I have already said about work. This is that greater than work is quietness of spirit. What could we do more for our restless age than give men some taste of it even one day in seven? And how shall we give, if we have not got it? Wherefore, there are few things so much required of us as that our souls should behave and quiet themselves within us as a weaned child, when we just allow life to speak to us till we hear the voice of God as the central calm within all hurry and change.

But this is not in conflict with what I have said of work, for there is no really good work possible without it. Even about our thinking we may with profit remember a saying of Goethe. "Meyer says, 'If thinking were not so hard.' But the worst of it is that the very hardest thinking will not bring thoughts. They must come like good children of God and cry, 'Here we are.'"

And whatever gospel may be inspired in this way, it is certainly not the accepted gospel of flurry.

For this quest it is necessary to be, at least in some measure, a man of leisure. This does not mean being without work. It is rather a way of doing our work. But it is different from the accepted notion of a busy man: and when the minister impresses the world as phenomenally busy, he should look to his ways with searching of heart.

That you should be anything else than preternaturally busy men may, however, seem to those of you who are carrying on large city congregations the suggestion of an ignoramus.

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But the fact remains that nothing really good or abiding can be done without quietness and even leisure : and no one needs it more than you do. Doing many things is not doing much, any more than saying many things is saying much. Perhaps you reply, Granted, but we should like you to show us how it is to be done. Can anyone find more than twelve working hours in the day ? I admit I am far from being a model. And what is more I realise that it is not all due to extra work. It is partly that I cannot put work so rapidly through my hands as I used to do, and I cannot direct my attention from it as rapidly and easily as was once in my power. Only if we work hard, have we any real leisure ; and our power to work hard has its limitation. Yet there is no situation in which, if we recognise the importance of leisure, we cannot keep it before us as our aim ; and we can do a great deal by distinguishing what is more important from what is less.

Much of the rush and pressure of the ministry is due to failure to make this distinction. We have not followed our own judgment in the sight of God, but have allowed ourselves to be too much determined by the common judgment in the sight of men which appreciates flurry and has no idea of the value of quiet patience. Mr. Cameron, the artist, after attending ecclesiastical gatherings, said, " The younger ministers are probably as able men as their predecessors, and are probably better equipped. But the older man commended their gospel of peace as men of peace, while the younger men look like business men running their show." This is a grave charge, and if it be true, we should look to it, for, as business men among business men, we are no use to them and have mistaken our calling.

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The question, as I have said, is what is most important. This means, In what have we real faith and confidence? What are we out to do, and how do we expect to do it? It is a question of running many meetings, but it is not merely a question of divided interests. It is a question of work for social and moral improvement, but it is at bottom neither social nor moral.

Schweitzer gives a picture of a short ministry of Jesus which was one succession of excited expectations and enthusiastic endeavours. After reading this, I sat down and read through the Gospel of Mark. I found not only a man of peace, but a man of leisure. When he had not leisure even to eat, he went into a desert place to rest awhile. But that is not the essential matter. He never preached the gospel of peace in a flurry. All his teaching speaks of leisure, not only from itself and from the world, but even from his ministry.

To teach in parables at all meant leisure. He noticed the flowers and the sky and the farmer at work and the children at play. Then think of what leisure he had for people when they wanted to see him. He not merely found time for them. They found him disengaged and at ease and ready to have a quiet talk with them. He did not hurry to prescribe for them and then say, "Now you must go, I have a long list to get through to-day." He said, "This is how I look at it. Now what do you think about it yourself?" Then he often left them to themselves and their own thoughts, yet only after he had taken time and trouble to show them what their real thoughts were.

It is worth our while to ask what was the secret of that busy but leisured life? It lay, I think, in

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what he did and did not do. He set himself to get men to think about God and to see what it meant to be His children, and about His kingdom and what should be their place in it. If he could not do that, he did not seem to think it worth while doing anything less. He would not have troubled to cross the street to make the most disreputable Publican into the most respectable church-going Pharisee. He never started any anti-everything campaign. His attempt at reformation in the temple was unique, and seems to have been, what we should all be the stronger for having occasionally, just an outburst of natural indignation at seeing merchandise made of religion. But he otherwise kept to his own rule. "Resist not evil," which does not mean "Don't fight," but, "Don't trouble about what is weak by its own nature and only flourishes by the absence of good. Labour for the good and let it replace evil."

If I did not know it before, the war taught me how right he is. No kind of merely accepted religion was worth anything : whereas any real religion and true sincerity, even much perplexed in faith and faulty in practice, came through amazingly.

But how much on which we spend our energies is just resisting evil ! How much is just trying to reform Publicans into Pharisees ! In this whole matter we have received, not our Lord's religious and moral judgment of men, but the external judgment of the world. How much that all our churches are trying to do did not interest him at all ! How much that interested him is expected by us to be a mere by-product of our other activities !

In addition to his knowledge of his message and the men to whom he gave it and the world in which it was given, he knew the Scriptures and used them

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with astonishing originality. Whether he read much may be questioned, but he somehow knew the mind of his age, and he knew how to answer its questions, and how to deal with its practical situations. But he never dealt with them by what we understand as practical methods.

I don't want to be dogmatic on what must be for every man a difficult matter of personal judgment—the question of how he shall apportion his time and energy. But I should like us to consider, whether we have not all made our lives unfruitfully as well as distractingly busy, just by not believing in the power of belief, which means in the power of our message to commend itself and do its own work. Instead, do we not constantly act as though, as it has been put, we do not wish to trust God any more than we can help? In this way in particular, we ought not to be of the world, which trusts, even in religion, the things seen and temporal, and does not take much stock of the power of things unseen and eternal. In short, the minister ought to be distinguished from the ordinary judgment even of his congregation, by thinking that the work of persuading men to true and high beliefs is the job best worth doing in the world.

II

THE MESSAGE

BY three things mainly a man's life is made either better or worse. They are : (1) the influence of his surroundings ; (2) the effect of his own actions ; (3) the power of his beliefs. Some ascribe everything to the first. A man is just what the influences are that mould him. Some ascribe everything to the second. A man's environment is very much what his actions make him, and his beliefs are mere explanations of them or sometimes excuses for them. Some ascribe everything to belief. What a man truly believes he will find in his environment, which is always so selected, and what he truly believes to-day he will be some day.

But all three are of an importance hardly to be exaggerated.

In respect of outward influences, it is plain that, as savages, we would not have been at all what we are as civilised beings. By the influences of our society and our education we are largely what we are. Therefore, the people who devote their energies to the direct purpose of having a better world have much to say for themselves.

Also everyone lives in a spiritual situation we can call his church, and in no Christian nation can this be quite separated from the Christian Church. Even the most blatant materialist would be a different person if he lived wholly by his professed creed, and did not, in spite of himself, live largely by a Chris-

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tianity which has come down to him by the Christian fellowship. As Ritschl says, he takes his religion more seriously and his science less seriously than he knows.

The institution of the Church is narrower than this, yet it is the source of most of it and remains important for sustaining it. In every form of it as an institution there are many defects : and perhaps no one should be in the ministry who is not conscious of them even in his own branch of it, and is not out to amend them. Yet, with all defects, there is no branch of it to which it is not better to belong than to none. Of our own form I have seen too much of the effect of our fellow-countrymen in England, losing their connection with it, and not finding another to replace it, to question its great value. There may be people who maintain a high level of spiritual life apart from the influence of any church connection, but I have not come across them. Nor have I yet discovered any institution into which to put one's efforts after a higher purpose in life with the same assurance that it will live and grow, than the poorest church. Therefore, the people whose supreme interest is in the institution of the Church, and who seek to serve it directly by what we may call ecclesiastical labours, have also much to say for themselves.

Again, it is impossible to ignore the effect of men's habits, practices, morals. It is impossible, for instance, to drink and gamble and at the same time maintain self-mastery and keep one's self under good influence and maintain faith in higher ideals. Licentiousness is not one vice, but corrupts the whole soul and debases the whole relation to our fellows.

It is no wonder, therefore, that there are people for whom practice is the supreme concern, and who

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think that if they can gain it even outwardly by temperance legislation, purity and anti-gambling campaigns, societies for uprightness in business and such like, they are doing the greatest work.

Finally, there is the effect of what in the inmost soul is really believed.

Unfortunately this is frequently confused with what people have merely not taken the trouble to reject, the effect of which may not be very great. But if belief mean what we are ready wholly and utterly to venture on, does it not determine above all else the world we live in and how we live in it ?

None of us may be indifferent to any of these considerations, but the question is, which is first in principle and most creative in practice. All work together, but the question is, by which should we most hope to alter the others. While I do not wish to undervalue any service for the good of man, a minister should, I think, be a person who believes that men are saved by faith.

In this, even among religious people, you will probably have to maintain a rather solitary conviction. Consider, for example, the discussion which has been going on lately in England over the prayer-book. On the one hand there is on both sides enormous concern about certain religious practices, with what men believe behind them falling into the background. On the other hand, you find statements like this in the newspapers : " I don't myself see anything in reservation but superstition. Many of those who want it, however, are good people ; and I don't care in the least what a man believes, so long as his life is right." It is the old story : " He can't be wrong whose life is in the right." Now, apart from any question of this particular belief, I am sure

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that he can be very far wrong, because, while his life to-day may be parasitic on beliefs he no longer holds intellectually, it will wither some day.

I know a Scot in London, a plumber, who never was more than eighteen months at school, yet is about the ablest and best read man I know. He said to me, "I have been in everything I thought would make for the good of the working man. But now I see that you can't have a better world till you have better people." And by "better people" he now means people with better beliefs, so that, though he speaks a great deal, he will not speak at all unless he can make a religious appeal.

In the end, does anything matter except what men truly believe? "Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint." Where there is no belief in man except as a smooth-skinned biped, why trouble even about economic justice or political freedom?

When I was a student, a great gathering of us were addressed by some very distinguished people—Browning and Lowell and Helmholtz and Pasteur and others. But what I most vividly remember was said by Lavalaye, the Belgian economist. He began, he said, by being of the school of Mill, with everything determined by supply and demand, with freedom mainly as political safeguards for freedom of exchange. But one day he was struck by the singular fact that all Christian countries, with the possible exception of Russia, were in some real sense free, and that no other country was. Then he saw that freedom depended, not on markets nor on political safeguards, but on the people for whom freedom was dearer than life, and that this went back to the great demand, "Let a man deny himself."

But a man can only deny himself on the basis of a

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belief in something greater than himself, in which he can truly find himself. There is not any true freedom which is not based on the duty and the right to obey its demands. Nor is there any perdurable basis for this except something which could be described as readiness to take up our cross and follow Christ.

Have we not been giving our case away by the many other things we have trusted? Anyhow I am convinced that no one has any business in the ministry unless he feels deeply and strongly that nothing else finally matters and that, with this right, nothing can continue to be wrong.

If this be so, the one important matter in the ministry, besides the man himself, is his message. And, indeed, the most important matter about the man, is what message he incarnates. If the message is big enough to deserve and maintain the interest of a whole lifetime, the fountain of inspiration, even in the longest ministry, can hardly run dry.

Even this fountain will not always run freely and copiously. No one worth his salt in the ministry escapes seasons of dryness of spirit, when he does not feel himself to be either Paul planting or Apollos watering, and when he thinks he would be better growing honest crops on a visible tillage field. But he will not go on the all too common round of trotting out all he knows easily for three years, then of pulling himself together and economising his stuff and using helps of kinds quite external to himself and doing more window-dressing, then having a respite by a change of pastorate, and, finally, after middle life, turning into a dull preaching and visiting and organising mechanic.

Many years ago, before I had myself entered on the task of training men for the ministry, the late

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John Watson said to me that the great defect of Presbyterian training was that we did not teach men to walk the hospitals. They were instructed about health, but not about disease. The whole business, he said, was too theoretical, too little practical. The Roman priest, in contrast, is taught all the rules of dealing with a penitent, and the American colleges have as many professors on the practical side as on the theoretical.

We were on our way to America, and, in the seven colleges in which I either preached or lectured, I made careful inquiries. Even the professors of practical subjects, I found, had very little faith in the method. President Wilson, with whom I stayed in Princeton, said, "You stick to your four subjects. Our colleges teach nothing fundamental and at first hand, and the practical stuff, they teach the men, either is never needed or, if it is, what has been taught has to be first forgotten and then learned from life afresh. The result is that within two years a man is dosing his people either with the last book he has read or with comments on the last thing in the newspapers." Shortly afterwards I was preaching in Albany. A veteran Scot came into the vestry to see me.

"That," he said, "is the first sermon I have heard for twelve years."

"You have been ill, I suppose," I said, "and not able to attend church."

"Oh, no," he said. "I have been at church mostly twice a Sunday. But I don't call a harangue on the last newspaper stunt a sermon."

Later I came to have some acquaintance with Roman methods, and I remember one illuminating incident. I had gone to see the publisher of my first

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book. He had been an Anglican vicar and had gone over to Rome through Newman's influence. He told me he had been reading Pusey's *Life*. I asked if it was good.

"No," he said, "it is not very good, but it is interesting; and what interested me most was how Protestant he remained to the end." I asked how that appeared.

"You know, of course, that he used to hear confession." I said I did, but we did not regard that as a specially Protestant performance.

"No," he said, "but Pusey would keep his penitents on their knees for hours trying to get at their motives, while any Catholic priest, who knows his business, can put anybody through in twenty minutes."

I don't know whether you see it or not, but the whole difference is there in a nutshell. The Roman priest had only to put the sinner right with God through the Church; Pusey could not eradicate from his mind the Protestant conviction that no one could be put right with God except through his own conscience. Moreover, behind that again lay the Roman view that you believe what the Church tells you to believe, while Pusey could not rid himself of the view that you do not really believe anything till you yourself see it.

Another incident was an exposition by a Jesuit priest of the Roman doctrine of venial and mortal sins. The impression made on me was that it was so like the judgment of the law courts that what were the venial sins of the gospels are the mortal sins of the confessional, and what are the mortal sins of the confessional were the venial sins of the gospel. Nor can the system escape. The confessional means

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casuistry, and casuistry means an external standard. Its rules can be taught, but, for that very reason, they would be worse than useless from our point of view.

Yet Jesus came a physician for the sick : and it may well be that we have not given this matter of spiritual disease the attention it deserves. With the rise of psycho-analysis the question has taken a new form. A friend of mine has devoted deep and continued attention to the subject. He has great power in discovering what is morbid and laying it bare : and he knows what to say and do in a really wonderful way.

Plainly there is something here with which one ought to come to terms. Students especially speak to me with a freedom which would have staggered my professors, yet no one ever thought of laying bare to me the wounds of his soul. If he did, I should be so distressed that I should almost certainly neither do nor say the right thing.

Is this merely a case of a doctor who has not conquered his nausea at seeing wounds ? I learned to look at all kinds of physical wounds in the war without a tremor, why should I feel, in looking at spiritual wounds, as if I had invaded the modesty of nature and were prying into what alone is God's concern and where He alone can help ?

Broadly, we all ought to have a keener sense of where our help is needed and more discernment and wisdom in knowing how to offer it. Some good women have the most wonderful way of seeming to be out of the road till they are needed, and then always to be at hand, with amazing tact in offering help and skill in rendering it. This surely would be a great gift in the ministry. In this way the ministry

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of Jesus was done among as ordinary people as any of your congregations, and it was wonderful just because he knew what was in men and was infallible in wisdom in dealing with it.

Yet the value of any conscious method for this is doubtful, and the rules of the psycho-analyst might be as dangerous as the rules of the confessional. Possibly he has his place, I don't know. But let everyone wait on his ministry : and I am quite sure that this is not mine, and, with possible exceptions, that it is not yours. My friend says I have a complex against psycho-analysis. This can dispose of anything, but it is not argument. I confess to a feeling that interest in the morbid never escapes being itself morbid. To be hunting out the worst kind of motive, and ascribing to complexes what I should meet by an appeal to reason and conscience, to worry about one's own inside perpetually when I should prescribe open air, or about other people, when what seems to me necessary for them is to live objectively in life's interests—is not an occupation spiritually profitable either to the physician or the patient.

I will even venture further to say that we can't with profit do violence to our own nature. Some of us find the pulpit trying enough. It seems to us quite sufficiently a confessional. To talk even there of our deepest conviction distresses our natural reserve. And most of us don't do it. Moreover, I feel inclined to defend us. We are there to preach objective truth, and, if the light is there, it will shine through of itself into the darkness. There is too much dealing with truth like the wise men of Gotham, who, instead of opening a window, tried to carry in light into their dark dwelling in their

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hats. All this means that the sole concern of central and vital consequence in any man's ministry is his message, which should be a gospel of health which is itself a gospel of healing.

As the apostle summed up his ministry we can sum up ours : " By manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience, in the sight of God."

To do it in the sight of God and not of man is not easier for us than for St. Paul, in these days of critical audiences, who are more impressed by facility of speech than by sincerity, and with the blue books and the press, and other devices of ecclesiastical gossip, which are a kind of *vox populi* which is not *vox Dei*.

But " in God's sight " is a blessed as well as a searching condition, for God knows what we have tried to do, even when we do not achieve it; and perhaps he sometimes knows that what in the eyes of men are our failures are our best successes. Anyhow the essential requirement is to say what we see to be true without fear or favour, as God gives it and not as man approves of it.

Nor is it easier to meet the second test, that our appeal be to every man's conscience. All sorts of demands are made of the preacher at present. He ought to be as dramatic as an actor, and flash ahead with scintillating sayings and pictures like a cinema. That is to say he should be manifest to men's love of the pleasing. A minister who can do it will go far : but the Church that does it is in its grave-clothes. People, we are only too keenly aware, want to have everything in them spoken to except their consciences. Rather than have the uncertain and upsetting business of truth and righteousness

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to face, they will accept almost any tradition and submit to almost any rule.

Yet, even if we do appeal to conscience, there is the great temptation to make it a particular kind of conscience. There is the really good man whose support is very valuable. But he resents any truth which is not conventional and any moral demand which disturbs his code of behaviour. Then there are the new easy-going ideas of the young people; and, if we have a working-class congregation, we are aware of a desire to hear more about the rights than the duties of the working-man. In every age there has been class conscience, and the Church has never succeeded in getting quite beyond it. But unless she is attempting to do so, she had better retire from business in favour of the cinema.

The gospel of the prophets ran them up very hard against social abuses; it was for his disturbance of things as they were, and not for his mere religious opinions, that Jesus was put to death; and his followers were quite rightly described as wishing to turn the world upside down. Nor are we likely to have very strong Christian convictions, yet be content with the world as it is. Among the many charges brought against the Christian Church is one which is only too true. It is that its ethic is too much mere negative respectability; and with this goes the charge that our congregations are not fellowships but merely social clubs. If this is so, it is a serious charge, because it is necessary for us to discover and proclaim what the truth we have to manifest says to the common human conscience, the conscience of rich and poor, educated and ignorant, man and woman, young and old.

Yet we no more appeal to every man's conscience

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by addressing ourselves to what he fears than by addressing ourselves to what he likes.

No doubt an appeal to fear is very immediate and effective, and there are still a good many people who think that the calling of the ministry has become feeble and ineffective from becoming too sentimental to use it. Yet it often remains the essence of the appeal even when hell is not thought to be a polite word to mention. The trouble about Fundamentalism is not that it is obscurantist, but that it is brutal. It is as much sown with anathemas as the Decrees of the Council of Trent, which just as much means that, if you don't swallow what you are told, you will go to an unhappy place. Nor is even this the worst. The worst is that it is taken to be hopeless to attempt to deal with human nature in any other way, and to believe that it can be persuaded just by seeing truth and trusting righteousness. In other words, it lacks faith to appeal to every man's conscience.

When St. Paul preached about faith, he had none of these helps. The Gentiles had not heard of the Old Testament. There was no New. The Church he spoke of was a mere quality of fellowship. Even Christ meant nothing for the hearers except as he appealed to their hearts and met their needs.

Nor was it different with Jesus, though he spoke to Jews. He used the Old Testament, but never as an external authority. He taught with the authority of reality, but never with authorities. He said, He who wills to do the will of God will know the teaching, and he who is taught of God comes to me, which means that we must be sincere with our own souls before he has anything to say to us.

In our day we are pretty well back at this position,

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not being likely to gain a hearing except for what itself is seen to be convincing. Some of us are greatly distressed about it. But is it not worth while asking ourselves whether we have a gospel with which we can appeal direct to men's consciences as Jesus and Paul did? And if we have, and are ready to face the world with it, may it not be a positive gain that these external props have fallen away? Is not the mere fact that the word of God we have to offer is labelled a tradition, and that it has been so often treated merely as such, that most makes it void?

This brings us to the last point, which is that all this is to be done simply by manifestation of the truth.

Preaching it is not the only way or even the best way of manifesting it: and there is some preaching which only veils it by making it stale. Perhaps we ought to recognise more fully that, only by the very roundabout way of making it shine in the lives of Christians, will it ever be manifested to the world. But I am speaking at present of the special task of the ministry as distinct from other tasks in the Church, and that in this matter is preaching: or shall we use a wider word and say teaching?

The chief mistake is to regard religion as a series of doctrines. To say that it is not does not mean that you are to preach without a theology. As a theologian I magnify my office: and only wish I fulfilled it better. But what a theology should not be is a series of doctrines.

Two things, I think, it ought to try to do—first, to show that the spiritual world is one world; and, second, that it includes the whole world, natural and supernatural. Unless a professional ministry wins some more central view of this world than is possible for the devout person in the pew, it is not

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easy to discern its justification, whereas a ministry from which the people are learning to see an ever-widening horizon does not readily wear out.

Let us sum up our theology under four doctrines, and I will try to explain what I mean. They are God as Father, the Kingdom of God, the Forgiveness of Sins, the Life Everlasting.

We can preach on the fatherhood of God by itself: and then it becomes the doctrine of a kindly, benevolent sort of person, which has no relation to our experience of the actual world as it exists. We can preach on the Kingdom of God by itself: and it becomes either a non-religious synonym for moral progress or everything for the best in the best of all possible worlds, which may sound edifying, but is never convincing. We may preach on the forgiveness of sins by itself: and it becomes either a device by which God condones our offences, or a way of saying, It does not matter this time, but don't do it again. We can preach on Eternal Life by itself: and it becomes a rather immoral appeal of award. Then Jesus Christ is attached to them in an external sort of way, instead of being the supreme means whereby we believe in them.

Something plainly is wrong. What is it?

The first reason is that they are treated as just doctrines and not as one experience from life, our own and the wider and higher life we have in revelation, and addressed to life, our own and the whole world about us. Even Jesus is only another doctrine, and not a person who enables us to live by faith in God in all that meets us and that is required of us.

Doctrines, as something you have dug out of the Bible, or found in one of the innumerable little argumentative booklets which flood the market, or

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have even reasoned about yourself, soon wear out.

Suppose you say that next Sunday you propose to preach on the Fatherhood of God. You have nothing before you but the doctrine. Have you ever thought of the long history of facing man's sin and the world's evil, by which men reached such an idea? It was the whole question of God in relation to the world and man, and it blinked nothing of their evil. Consider how it is related in the gospels to the most pessimistic view even of men's religion and the most appalling rejection of the good. Yet Jesus relates it to the whole world and to all men. It is his view of nature, with God sending his rain on the just and the unjust; and of human nature, with its perfection in doing good to those who despitefully use us. In short it is at once victory over our own hearts within and over evil without. It is not an easy doctrine of natural providence, but a view of life's meaning and the soul's value, of a purpose in the world and beyond it, which makes life one thing with God and quite another without him. Perhaps, when you see this, you won't preach about the Fatherhood of God at all, but you will have a view of all experience in its light which will give you endless ways of approach to it, and it will not be absent from anything you have to say.

Again you could preach in such a way on the Kingdom of God that you ought not to touch on it again for a year or more. But our Lord could talk about it for his whole ministry. Why? You say perhaps that it was an apocalyptic expectation. But so it is always. It is just the conviction that what should be is more real than what is, and that we can live in it now as if it had come. What determines it is God's valuation of his children, to which all

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material good is subordinate. It is good news to our poverty and only to our poverty, yet it is a view of life as sitting in abundance with our fellows at God's table, and as such is a solution, among other things, of the problem of material need. Again, perhaps, when you realise how it is the whole order of the family of God, you won't preach on it, but you will find endless approaches to it and it will be an atmosphere of light and warmth for all you say.

You have perhaps rather shirked preaching on the forgiveness of sins. If it was to mean an abstract discussion of it, you were right. But, if it concerns God's whole way with man, as for healing as well as health, it will be central and urgent. Jesus forgave sins, and the abiding marvel is that, only with him, increasing sensitiveness of conscience is increasing peace. In the parable of the prodigal son he illustrated it. But he did not preach on it, though it is never absent from his preaching. Again it has a long history, not of thinking merely about God, but of finding a righteous world that is more than rendering to every one his desert, a whole new interpretation of what is deepest in one's own soul, most effective in life, most transforming in experience, in short a whole world which is God's healing robe, from which we have all right understanding of ourselves and of our relationship with others in God. Again, you might not need to preach about it at all, if you realised continually the whole of experience to be an order of grace.

Finally, you could make several lectures about immortality. You could begin with Plato and Spiritualism, and go on to the moral argument, and end up perhaps with the argument from the love of God Jesus uses. You could also fill up a little with

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a discussion of the relation of soul and body. This might be useful as an answer to difficulties. Difficulties have sometimes to be met. But no one ever won a real belief from arguments. Christ's argument has power just because it is not an argument, but an appeal to the deep experience, which was the greatest victory man ever won over the fleeting, by learning to live in what was eternal.

What gives the doctrine of immortality at once assurance and meaning is this long history of man's victory over the transient. Even the lowest savages win some footing in the fleeting by means of it. Yet it was not of a kind the prophets could use. Only as the hope rose upon them out of their own work and the sense of its eternal significance did it become a new kind of victory. But it grew in significance with the assurance of God here and now and the enlarging vision of his purpose. Finally, Christ brought life and immortality to light, not in rising from the dead, but in the good news of God, that is by manifesting a purpose which could never end and a life in this which could never die. Through this gospel Paul had his faith in a life in which he would see fully that all things are of love, which here he saw at best in broken glimpses.

This plainly again has endless ways of approach, and, above all, it is a forever and forever in all we have to offer men both of service and of hope, giving significance to every ordinary human relation, so that nothing that is right in it is less than eternal, and thereby showing that we can afford to take the long road of having better men in order to have a better world, and not distress ourselves that we shall never live to see even the sure first fruits of it. If in this way all your preaching is informed with the power

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of an endless life, you may not need to preach on the doctrine of immortality at all, yet it will be capable of endless ways of approach and of endless application.

There is no basis for a doctrine of God apart from what He means for the world and man ; nor is there any for a doctrine of Christ apart from reconciliation ; or of the Spirit apart from what He means for the community and the spiritual life ; nor is there any for a doctrine of immortality apart from the power of an endless life which makes us victorious here and now and in the assurance of a love from which nothing can separate us.

The other matter of importance is that all this is one world of reality. What is a doctrine of the Father which does not give a new creation and a new communion of His children ? What is His Kingdom if not the family of the Father ? What is forgiveness of sins if not that returning to the Father is at once the condition and the goal, and abiding in His household or kingdom its security ? What is immortality if not the continuance of what is thereby made life indeed ?

I knew a little the late Baron Frederick von Hugel, whose writings some of you may have read, and I shared with many a deep esteem for him. Yet I am quite unable to follow him in his view of Catholicity as a sort of Peter's sheet in which is let down from heaven and kept from spilling separately into the void, something of authority and of freedom, of the institution and of individual piety, of mysticism and of rites, of morality and of spirituality.

Better this than nothing at all. But it is not the way of the gospel which is all good news of God, which has many branches, bearing all manner of precious fruit. It is all freedom and all loyalty, all fellowship and all being alone with God, all in

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present duty and discipline and all in hope, all moral and all spiritual, because it is all one world of life and peace in one God.

To see this will not take all the drudgery from a life in the ministry. You may still, as Johnson said, just have to sit down to it doggedly. Yet you will not feel that you have exhausted your message, but know that you live in a spiritual world as endlessly varied as the visible. It too grows dull when we are dull. Yet it is one thing to realise our own limitation, and another to think that we have exhausted God. When we say, "Give us this day our daily bread," we should mean sufficient grace as well as sufficient food. Superfluity has its dangers in one case as the other. What we should trust to have is not everything clear, but strength to go on seeking truth; not everything inspired, but sufficient inspiration not to fail or be discouraged. We older men especially may be a little footsore and weary, without the former fertility and verve, but perhaps our greatest use of life and what most helps others is just to learn to walk and not be weary; for common folk seldom do much soaring or running. Possibly you can do nothing better for most people than to show them how to plod on.

There was only one of our larger wealthier congregations from whom we received many students. They were all fine fellows and are doing the finest work at home and on the mission field. And all of them came when the minister was just setting his teeth and carrying on, dying on his feet of Bright's disease. It makes one wonder just what, in the sight of God, our best may really be, and it enables us to hope that, if we lose the bright dreams of our youth, as old men we may see even surer visions.

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